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GARDEN NOTES

Number Nine

Visits to Gardens of
VILMORIN
and
CAYEAUX and LE CLERC



Studying Irises at Verrier

*Fourth of a series of descriptive notes on
Visits to Foreign Gardens.*

Issued by
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Vilmorin, Andrieux and Co.

The largest growers of Irises in France are the Vilmorins, or Vilmorin, Andrieux & Company as the firm name reads. They are also the largest growers of farm seeds in France, possibly the largest in all the world, and during the one hundred and eighty (180) years of the existence of the firm they have built up a wonderful organization with competent men in charge of every department. Philippe Vilmorin, the former head of the business, who died during service in the late war, was a great lover of the Iris, and he selected as manager of this department, M. Mottet, a man with a greater knowledge of plants, trees and shrubs than any one else I have ever met.

M. Mottet speaks perfect English and it was through his initiative that an Iris conference was held in Paris, to which all the countries of the world were invited, and to which I was a delegate. But I was not the only representative from the United States, for the President of "The American Iris Society," Mr. John C. Wister, of Philadelphia, and Mr. C. F. Wassenberg, of my own home town, Van Wert, Ohio, were also in attendance. England sent two representatives, Mr. W. R. Dykes, Secretary of The Royal Horticultural Society and author of the greatest book on the Iris ever published, and Mr. Robert Wallace, the largest grower of Irises in the kingdom. Switzerland had a most able representative in the person of M. Henri Corevon, of Geneva, whose specialty I am told is rock plants, and on which he is recognized as a world authority.

The future publications of "The American Iris Society" will tell the results of the conference, but I wish to tell you of our visit to the Vilmorin Iris gardens, or rather Iris fields, for the magnitude of their operations demands a word which means something larger than the idea which the word "garden" conveys.

Every member of the conference was invited to visit them establishment and to have lunch out at Verrier, which consists not only of hundreds of acres of land, but also of most commodious buildings with every conceivable equipment, even including an immense laboratory in which they find the percentage of sugar in the beets from which they grow their seed. Is not that a nice application of science to the business life of the practical world?

But let us go at once to their Irises, for they are the object of our visit. I should tell you in advance, however, that

many of the best known Irises of commerce are Vilmorin introductions, so you have a right to expect greater things among their new varieties. They have already given us ALCAZAR, ARCHEVEQUE, ELDORADO, MONSIGNOR and PARISIANA, but the new things we see today are improvements even upon most of these fine varieties, although ALCAZAR still ranks with the very best.

OPERA is not one of their very latest, but is one of the world favorites with a color which it will be hard to improve upon. AMBIGU and DEJAZET are nearly in the same class, but my favorite of the three is OPERA.

ISOLINE, when it blooms, is one of their best on account of its beautiful rose-lilac coloring, and it seemed to me to be blooming remarkably well this year both in France and England. I have decided that it is worthy of two years' cultivation for one year's bloom, and I will give it plenty of space even if it does not bloom freely every year.

Of Vilmorin's latest introductions, AMBASSADEUR is undoubtedly the very best, and it is also one of the world's best. I like its name. I am glad it is masculine, particularly since the other two great French Irises have feminine names, and since this has the masculine name, I am glad it is the tallest of the three. Its color is an improvement upon PROSPER LAUGIER and JACQUESIANA, both of which, however, still deserve a place in our gardens. Its manner of growth is an improvement even upon Alcazar, which, however, it does not resemble in color. As it multiplies very rapidly all Iris lovers will soon have a chance to see it in their gardens, or in one of the many Iris shows, which are now becoming so popular in the United States.

My next choice among Vilmorin's new Irises is MAGNIFICA, although MEDRANO seems to attract the most attention. MAGNIFICA reminds me of ISOLINE, but it is larger and of darker color, and apparently a better grower, although we probably should see it in our own gardens a few years before deciding whether it is a good grower or not.

MEDRANO'S color approaches tyrian rose combined with yellow, which gives it a tawny appearance. It is taller than OPERA, which has a somewhat similar coloring, but I am not willing to concede that it is an improvement upon OPERA. I believe OPERA has come to stay, and I am sure it will be a favorite in American gardens. Vilmorin's BALLERINE is in the LORD OF JUNE class, but as I have not seen them growing together I cannot say which is

superior, but you may know that I give it high praise when I link its name with LORD OF JUNE. I had expected to wait until I told you of my visits to English gardens to tell you how much I think of LORD OF JUNE, but I might as well tell you right now that it will be very hard to find a better Iris. CLUNY is a splendid tall pallida with just a little suggestion of the same elusive colors we find in MLLÉ SCHWARTZ.

Other new varieties in the Vilmorin collection are MRS. WALTER BREWSTER, which is also a pallida, slightly lower growing and also slightly darker than our old favorite, DALMATICA. ZOUAVE, strictly a ladies' type of Iris, is somewhat similar to Mr. Farr's MARY GARDEN, and I am sure it will be welcomed. TURCO, which is a lilac-pink and white bloom, is not as large and I do not believe it is as good, or as attractive as our own American variety, ANNA FARR. TRAINON, which is another ladies' Iris with lilac and lilac-pink coloring, is warm and attractive looking. MOLIERE and RAFFET, which are the last two in the list of their more recent varieties, are both on the extra large AMAS type of bloom with more purple than AMAS, MOLIERE having for me a warmer shade of color than RAFFET.

I often wonder if other Iris enthusiasts have the feeling of warmth or chill in the colors of their favorite blooms. In my Peony garden I come into contact with colors, the great majority of which I naturally want to describe as warm, for it seems I can even feel their radiance, but in my Iris garden I very often find colors which seem to me can be described as cold, even ice cold.

You see how easy it is for me to wander away from my subject, which is Vilmorin's Irises, but even if I do wander away I am very glad to come back again.

On our day at Verrier, all the guests spent at least a part of the morning in the Iris fields, but to the credit of the three Americans, I want to say every one of them spent not only the entire morning among the Irises, but as soon as lunch was over, they were back again not only admiring the blooms but also filling their note books, as you will notice in the picture, reproduced on the cover page of this booklet.

All of the Irises I have told you about so far can be purchased, although many of them can be had only in very limited quantities, as Vilmorin's sales manager told me, when cutting my order down on some varieties to only a fourth of my desires, that if they filled everybody's order complete they would have no roots left for propagating next

year's stock.

But we Americans were interested in some very new seedlings, of which they would not sell us even a single root, but which they told us they hoped to place upon the market three or four years hence. The one which everyone concedes has merit is a yellow variety which will have the name CHASSEUR. I am not sure how it compares with SHEKINAH, our great American yellow Iris, but I will want both of them, and so I am sure, will every other real enthusiast.

ALLIES is the name of another new Vilmorin seedling which has a color quite similar to OPERA, but again I am not willing to concede that it is better than OPERA, for OPERA has already made its splendid record for color, beauty, and above all, adaptability to every kind of soil and location. In nearly every garden I visited I would spy a beautiful bright section, and when I would hurry over to that part of the garden and inquire the name of the variety which made it so attractive, I would invariably get the same answer. Why do you ask? Don't you know OPERA? I believe I do really know it now, but I am willing to know it still better.

SPAHI and MARSOUIN are the names of two other seedlings which all three Americans would have been glad to add to their collections, but I know I did not succeed in doing it, and I very much doubt if my friends were more successful.

I told you that the head of the firm lost his life in the late war, but I am sure you will be glad to know that he left four sons, and that two of them have the ambition to look forward to continuing, during their lifetime, the business which has the record of one hundred and eighty (180) successful years already to its credit. France is now somewhat of a military nation, and I suppose it is natural that the other two sons should look forward to the service of their country, one in the army, and the other in the navy. However, I am sure that we, who love gardens, will feel like congratulating the sons who stay in the business, and that we will all look forward with great joy to the time when nations will not make war any more, and when we will need neither armies nor navies.

Cayeaux and Le Clerc

At the Show held in connection with the Paris Iris Conference, some of the very best blooms were exhibited by Cayeaux & Le Clerc, a firm of whom I had previously heard

very little. All of the Americans in our party were very anxious to see their gardens, and as we discovered that Mr. Wallace and Mr. Dykes, the English representatives to the Conference, were equally anxious to see them, we decided to form a party and make a half day excursion out to the suburban town in which they were located. For the benefit of any of my readers who wish to get in touch with these growers, I will tell you they have a Paris office, 8 Quai de Megisserie, next door to Vilmorin's.

We had a very pleasant ride out into the country and we arrived early enough to see the Irises in all their morning freshness, before the heat of the day had any bad effect upon the flowers.

We were delighted with the appearance of their gardens, and with the great number of crosses they had made, and with the very careful records of their crosses. We knew that all originators of new varieties must have at least one object or result which they are striving for, and although my very limited knowledge of the French language did not allow me to discuss the matter with them, yet I feel sure from my observations in their garden, that Cayeaux & La Clerc are striving for abundance of bloom on each plant.

In taking the matter up with Mr. Wallace, I found that he also was very much impressed with the great quantity of bloom on each clump in some of their newer productions. I am sorry I did not ascertain whether the result was achieved by having their new plants produce more buds than other Irises, or whether the result was obtained by having a greater percentage of the usual number of buds in bloom at the same time. As I have purchased at least one each of all their new introductions, I will have an opportunity to observe them in my own garden, and I may have some interesting results to tell in my Garden Notes next year and the year following. But quantity of blooms is not their only aim, for they are achieving much more than that. I had spoken of the Show which was held in connection with the Iris Conference, and at the Show the Swiss, English and American representatives were very kindly and courteously asked to sit with the judges and pass upon the merits of the new seedlings.

This gave us an especially good chance to see all the new French varieties, without knowing from whose gardens they had come, and by referring to my notes made at the show I

find that FIGARO, JEAN CHEVREAU and LE GRAND FERRE were the varieties given an Award of Merit. After the show was over, I heard that all these varieties came from Cayeaux & Le Clerc's garden, and I am under the impression that they are their own seedlings, but in this I may be mistaken, for in France, as in the United States, a grower may exhibit plants originated by some one else. I must confess that a speaking knowledge of French would have been of great advantage to me for Mr. Dykes, who speaks French as fluently as English, was as much at home in this French garden and at the Show as if he had been in his own England.

My notes are not as complete as I now wish they were, but from them I find that LE GRAND FERRE is very large and that the predominating colors are pink and buff. Of course you will know when I say pink that I must mean lilac-pink or pink-lilac, for I have become convinced that a real pink and a real red have not yet been produced in an Iris.

My notes tell me also that FIGARO is tall with tan standards and light mulberry falls, and that it is somewhat like Mr. Farr's American variety, QUAKER LADY, but with a stronger color. BELISAIRO is, I believe, the new name for FIGARO, adopted since the show.

In this connection I would like to tell my English readers that Mr. B. H. Farr, of Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, has originated some of the most satisfactory Irises in cultivation, of which ANNA FARR, QUAKER LADY, MARY GARDEN, MT. PENN, RED CLOUD, POCAHONTAS and JUNIATA are most worthy representatives.

I trust you will excuse this reference to American varieties in this connection, but I really want my English readers to know that America is wide awake in its study of the Iris, and that we have formed "The American Iris Society" with over six hundred members and that Iris Shows or exhibitions are held every year in several different parts of the United States.

But, coming back to Cayeaux & Le Clerc's varieties, my note book informs me that JEAN CHEVREAU is a ladies' Iris—of very delicate coloring, good for cut flowers and not intended for massing. The people who like MADAME CHOBIAUT and MARY GARDEN will find a place in their garden for this new variety.

The next entry in my note book tells me that MADAME ABEL CHATENAY has a delightful rose color and that it

has more merit than JEAN CHEVREAU, but evidently the majority of the judges did not agree with me, for it did not receive an Award of Merit and JEAN CHEVREAU did receive that coveted honor.

I am sure you can realize that a man spending between two and three months in the Iris gardens of France and England would naturally want to procure for his own garden the best varieties from every garden, and for the benefit of other enthusiasts in both England and the United States, I am going to give you a list of the other very new varieties I thought good enough to purchase from Cayeaux & Le Clerc, but remember I am not sure they are all their own introductions, some may be presents from Denis; I cannot tell.

LIBERTY, which my notes tell me is rose and tan, with more rose in the falls than in the standards;

TROUVAILLE and ECLAREUR, both of which my notes say are improvements upon RHEIN NIXE.

IMPERATOR, is a big red variety of the Ed. Michel type;

PEAU ROUGE has rather dull red standards and wine-colored falls with mahogany and white lines at the base of the falls;

SALONIQUE, which is another claimant for honors in the RHEIN NIXE color, has cream standards, with falls of the brightest red-purple. But unfortunately it is not so tall as RHEIN NIXE.

Most all these Irises I have told you about are yet only novelties and can be purchased only in very, very limited quantities, probably not more than one of a kind, but I hope some other American purchases them soon, so that we can give them a tryout in America and see if any of them are in the class with MLLÉ SCHWARTZ, MADAME GAUDI-CHAU and AMBASSADEUR.

In addition to their new introductions, Cayeaux & Le Clerc have originated at least four good Irises which are now in commerce; EUGENE BONVALET and PETIT VITRY, both of which are somewhat of the same type as MON-SIGNOR, and have merit; MADAME BLANCHE PION, which has deep cream or light tan standards with lavender falls, and MA MIE, which is perhaps the most pleasing of all, for it is in a class with FAIRY and ANNA FARR, and any Iris which can travel in that class must have merit.

I am sure that in the next few years this firm and their Irises will be known over the entire Iris world.

Van Wert, Ohio, Oct. 14, 1922.